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CHRIST's

WARNING TO THE CHURCHES,

TO BEWARE OF

FALSE PROPHETS,

WHO COME AS

WOLVES IN SHEEP's CLOTHING:

AND THE

MARKS BY WHICH THEY ARE KNOWN.

ILLUSTRATED IN

TWO DISCOURSES.

WITH AN APPENDIX.

DIVINITY SCHOOL LIBRARY. HARVARD UNIVERSITY

BY JOSEPH LATHROP, D. D.
Pastor of the first Church in Westspringfield.

There were false prophets among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you——And many shall follow their pernicious ways.——*Apostle Peter.*

ELEVENTH EDITION,
REVISED, CORRECTED, AND MUCH ENLARGED.

BOSTON:

PUBLISHED BY ISAIAH THOMAS, JUN.
NO. 6 MARLBORO'-STREET.

Samuel Avery, Printer.
1811.

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DISTRICT OF MASSACHUSETTS, TO WIT:

BE IT REMEMBERED, That on the tenth day of December A. D. 1810, and in the thirty-fifth year of the Independence of the United States of America, ISAIAH THOMAS, jun. of the said District, has deposited in this Office the Title of a Book, the Right whereof he claims as Proprietor in the words following, to wit: "CHRIST's WARNING to the CHURCHES, to beware of False Prophets, who come as wolves in sheep's clothing: and the marks by which they are known: illustrated in two Discourses, with an Appendix. By JOSEPH LATHROP, D. D. Pastor of the First Church in West-Springfield. There were false prophets among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you—And many shall follow their pernicious ways.—Apostle Peter.——Eleventh Edition, revised, corrected and much enlarged".

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WILLIAM S. SHAW, { *Clerk of the District of Massachusetts.*

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PREFACE.

It has been a conjecture of some, who have read the former editions of the following discourses, that the author has a special view to certain sects, as Methodists and Baptists; and aimed to place them in an odious light. But the conjecture is unfounded. He had no particular view to these, or any other denomination; but a general view to disorderly teachers of all denominations.

The discourses were written and preached, when methodists were scarcely known in this part of the country, and when baptists were little distinguished by the intemperance of their zeal for proselytism, and when neither of them attempted to make divisions among his people.

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Curiosity will perhaps ask, what then was the occasion of the discourses? It was this:

Towards the end of the year 1780, *when the author was in a low state of health, there came into his parish a foreigner, who professed to have been a settled minister in England, and to be one of* our *denomination. He brought with him no credentials; but assigned, as a cause of the omission, the precipitancy of his flight from his country to escape the rage of political persecution, to which he was become obnoxious by his active zeal and mighty influence in support of the American cause against the British ministry. He called himself a disciple of* Whitefield, *talked much about his conversion, made great pretentions to piety, and expressed an ardent affection for the people of the authors charge in their destitute condition. In a man of so much piety, patriotism and benevolence the want of credentials was easily excused. He was invited to supply the pulpit for a time, to which he readily consented. He not only preached on the sabbath, but also appointed frequent lectures*

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and evening conferences in different parts of the parish, and acted as officially, as if he had been the stated minister. He labored to disaffect the minds of the people to their minister, and reviled all standing ministers—taught that every saint had a right to preach, if he could find hearers—that saints certainly knew each others hearts—that all whom they could not fellowship, were unregenerate—that the church ought to admit none to her communion, but those whom she knew *to be real converts, and none ought to come to the communion, but those, who* knew *themselves to be such—that there were unregenerate persons in the church, from whom the regenerate ought to withdraw—that in scripture, beside the* lit eral *sense, there was a* mystical *or* spiritual *sense, which none but saints vnderstood, and which was immediately communicated to them by the spirit of God, &c. &c.*

After a few sabbaths the people were generally dissatisfied with their new preacher ; and the dissatisfaction became so apparant, that he left the pulpit, and set up a private meet-

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ing, at which a small number attended for a short time. But he proceeded not far, for his folly was made manifest to all men; and he withdrew, and went where he could find a place.

As soon as the author had recovered such a measure of health as to resume his public labors, he endeavored to correct the erroneous sentiments, which some had imbibed on the subjects before mentioned, and with which some serious minds seemed to be perplexed. Among other discourses relative to those subjects, he delivered the two which here follow, on "Christ's warning to beware of false prophets." *They were heard with seriousness, and followed with happy effects.*

As it was thought that the subject was growing more important in the country; that many had paid little attention to it; and that some were in danger of being misled by designing men, the author, on advice of his brethren in the ministry, and at the request of his people, consented to their publication. And as they have passed through several large

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editions, he hopes they have been useful abroad, as well as among the people of his own charge. The sermons on the other subjects alluded to, were published, and most of them are inserted in his volumes lately republished.

Westspringfield, August, 1816.

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DISCOURSE I.

MATTHEW VII. 15, 16.

Beware of False Prophets, who come unto you in Sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening Wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits.

GOD has, in all ages, had a church in the world; and he will continue it, until the world shall be no more. His church has subsisted in different forms; but under every form he has appointed, that there should be public teachers in it, to open the important truths, and inculcate the sacred duties of religion. Under the old testament there were prophets, and under the new testament there were apostles, ordained for this end: And Christ has plainly signified, that the order of religious teachers shall be preserv-

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ed, until the saints shall be gathered together, in one body in heaven.

As in all ages there have been public teachers of religion, so there have also been *false* teachers, who have assumed a sacred character, and with corrupt views, have endeavoured to draw away disciples after them. There were false prophets among the Jews; and Christ and his apostles have warned us, that there shall be false teachers among Christians, who shall privily bring in dangerous heresies, and corrupt men from the simplicity of the gospel.

Our Saviour says in the text, *Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.*

But if they come in sheep's clothing, how shall we distinguish them from sheep: Christ adds, *By their fruits ye shall know them.* They may carry on the deception for a time; but their corrupt dispositions will, sooner or later, betray them. Observe their motions, and you will perceive the ferocity, wildness, and greediness of the wolf,

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notwithstanding the stolen fleece on their backs.

My brethren, as this is a time when errour and wickedness much abound; when new and strange doctrines are taught; and when teachers, of one sort and another, are starting up with pretentions to guide souls in the way to heaven—it concerns you carefully to distinguish between true teachers and corrupt seducers. That you may the more easily guard against the common danger, I shall lay before you with great plainness, the marks by which false teachers are to be known. I shall not apply these marks to any sect or denomination; I shall only point them out to you exactly as they lie in the scriptures, and shall leave you to make the application, as you may find occasion.

I. They who refuse to enter into office, in the way which the gospel prescribes, are to be rejected: They have one plain mark of false teachers. As this is the grand mark of distinction, I shall consider it largely.

Our Saviour says, John x. 1. *He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but*

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climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. Christ is the door ; not only the door by which the *sheep* enter into the fold, to enjoy the shepherd's care, as mentioned verse 9, but also the door by which the *shepherd* enters to take the charge of the sheep ; as here represented. To enter by the door, is to enter by Christ, and in conformity to the order which he has appointed. The qualifications requisite in public teachers and the manner of induction to the sacred office, are pointed out in various parts of scripture, and very particularly in Paul's epistles to Timothy and Titus. It is there required, that they be men furnished with competent knowledge and learning, especially in divine things ; not novices—that they be sound in faith ; not corrupters of the word of God—that they be holy and blameless in their lives ; not chargeable with any vice—that they be men of general good report ; not of unknown, much less of infamous character ; and that they be tried and approved by the elders of the

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church ; not such as rashly intrude themselves into office.

The apostle says, Heb. v. 4. *No man taketh this honour to himself, but he* only has a right to it, *who is called of God, as was Aaron*, and as were his sons. How *they* were called, we are informed in the 28th chapter of Exodus. They were consecrated to the priesthood by Moses, God's minister, who was commanded 'to separate that family from among the children of Israel, and to anoint, sanctify and consecrate them, that they might minister in the priest's office.'

Speaking of the call of the Gentiles, Rom. x. 14. the apostle asks, *how shall they hear without a* preacher? *And how shall they preach, except they be* sent? There must be a *sending*, a regular *mission*, to authorise them to preach the gospel.

That the work of public teaching in the church is not *common* to *every* Christian, who is pleased to assume it; but peculiar to *some*, to those who are *sent*, and *called* thereto in the gospel way, the apostle plainly instructs us in his epistle to the Ephesians,

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chap. iv. and in his first epistle to the Corinthians, chap. xii. *When Christ ascended on high, he gave gifts to men ; and he gave* some *apostles ;* some *prophets ;* some *evangelists ;* and some *pastors and teachers, for the work of the ministry, and for the edifying of the body of Christ.* There were only *some* to be teachers : It was not intended that every one, who listed, should act in this capacity, under pretence of edifying the church. *God has set* some *in the church* to officiate in this character ; *first apostles ; then prophets ; and then teachers. Are* all *apostles ? Are* all *prophets ? Are* all *teachers ?*—By no means. If all the several parts of the body were one member, where were the body ? And if all the members of the church should assume one office, where were the church ? All things are to be done decently and in order.

The apostles themselves received their commission immediately from Christ. In the time of his ministry on earth, he gave to the twelve, and afterwards to the seventy disciples, an express command to go and preach the kingdom of God among the Jews.

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After his resurrection this commission was enlarged. *All power*, says he, *in heaven and in earth is given to me; go ye therefore and teach all nations.* Matth. xxviii. Though they had now *received*, yet they were not furnished to *execute* this extensive commission: Therefore Christ adds, *Tarry ye at Jerusalem*, exercising your ministry there, *until ye be endued with power from on high—for ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence.* Accordingly, about ten days after this, on the day of Pentecost, when they were all assembled together (all the hundred and twenty disciples, who had companied together all the time, that Christ went in and out among them; when *these* were assembled together) the gift of tongues was bestowed upon them, as that of miracles had been before: And now they were furnished to preach the gospel among all nations. As these were ordained immediately by Christ, so they were authorized to ordain others.

Paul was an apostle, not by man, but by Jesus Christ; yet, after he received the gos-

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pel, he presumed not to preach, until Ananias, who is supposed to have been one of the seventy disciples, came to him, and by an express command from Christ, laid his hands on him, and told him, 'He was a chosen vessel to bear Christ's name among the Gentiles, as well as Jews.' The miracle which Ananias performed, in restoring Paul to his sight, was an evidence of the authenticity of his commission. Acts ix. 15, 16, 17, 18—and chap. xxii. 12, 13, 14, 15.

Afterward, when Paul and Barnabas were about to carry the gospel to the Gentiles, they were, by the direction of the Holy Ghost, separated to that work by the prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch, 'who fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, and sent them away.' Acts xiii. 1, 2, 3. And these apostles, as they went through various cities of the Gentiles, preaching the gospel, and confirming believers, 'ordained them elders in *every* church, commending them, by fasting and prayer, to the grace of God.' Acts xiv. 23.

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These elders, who were ordained by the apostles and first ministers, were at the same time authorised to transmit the office to others. Timothy was ordained by the 'laying on of the hands of the presbytery, in the presence of many witnesses:' And the things, which he had received, the same he was ordered to commit to faithful men, who should be able to teach others also: And he is solemnly cautioned to 'lay hands suddenly on no man.' 1 Epistle, v. 22—2 Epistle, ii. 2. And Paul says to Titus, who was a minister in the island of Crete, 'For this purpose have I left thee in Crete, that thou mightest ordain elders in *every* city, as I had appointed thee.' Chap. i. 5. But why should Titus be left there to ordain elders, if the eldership might be assumed at pleasure, or be conveyed by private brethren? There is not in all the gospel history, a single example of ordination, or recommendation to the work of the ministry, by any other than the bishops and elders of churches; and to such only are given the directions relating to this matter.

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We find also, that in case a complaint arises against a minister, it is to be referred, not to private brethren, but to elders or pastors of churches. To Timothy as a bishop is this instruction given by Paul. *Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.* 1 Epistle, v. 19. He is cautioned not to *ordain* any to the ministry, but such as could bring a good report; for when one desires an office, it is incumbent on him to exhibit evidence of his qualifications. But against one *already in office* a bare report is not to be received; there must be an accusation supported by two or three witnesses, to eject him from office, or bring him under censure.*

* To approbate and recommend candidates for the ministry is the appropriate duty of ministers. In this duty, great caution and fidelity should be exercised, that the churches may not be deceived. Regard should be had not only to their soundness in faith, and their acquirements in knowledge, but also to their pious and virtuous character. They must have 'a good report.' If there be any ill report, which, if true, would disqualify them for the ministry, and this report have the appearance of credibility, the recommendation ought to be suspended, till the report is examined and disproved, that so they may go forth with a fair reputation. To clear their own character is a duty which belongs to them.

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Every church has a right to *choose* her own minister ; but she cannot *make* a minister. He must be separated to the work by the elders of the churches. When it was judged necessary, that a certain number of meet persons should be appointed to preside over the distribution of the church stock, and the ministration to the poor, the twelve apostles referred the *choice* to the multitude of the disciples ; but the *appointment* and *ordination* they reserved to themselves. ' They called the multitude of the

But no report, till substantiated by evidence before a proper judicature, is a sufficient cause for a people to withdraw from *their* minister, or for his brethren to discard and eject him. If bare report be a just cause for *one* to renounce a minister, it is a just cause for *another*, and for *every one* to renounce him ; and thus he will be placed at the mercy of every disaffected person, who has wickedness enough to fabricate, and influence enough to circulate a scandalous story concerning him. And in effect he will be deposed from office without a trial. In a regular christian society, it is to be supposed, there are men of piety and discernment, who will be dissatisfied with an heretical or immoral minister, and will desire his amendment or removal. If they see occasion for a trial of their minister, they will have discretion and influence enough to bring it forward. If a christian people are satisfied with their minister, the presumption generally ought to be, that there is no solid ground of complaint against him. In this case vague report ought to be disregarded.

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disciples, and said, Look ye out seven men of honest report, whom *we* may appoint over this business: And they chose seven, and set them before the apostles, who fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them.' Acts vi.

A Christian church is compared to a household, and to a city, in respect of the order and government, the peace and unity, that ought to be preserved in it. But if every man might assume the office of a teacher at pleasure, where would be the order and unity? There would be the same confusion and distraction, as in a state where every one claimed a right to exercise the powers of magistracy.

You see then, that they, who take on them the office of teachers in the church, without submitting their call and qualifications to that mode of trial, which the gospel has instituted, are to be considered as intruders, and rejected as imposters; for they come not in by the door. Their affected contempt of regular approbation betrays a consciousness of their want of the qualifica-

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tions which the gospel requires, and indicates such arrogance, pride and presumption, as ought never to appear in one, who professes to have learnt the religion of the meek and lowly Jesus.

The apostle Peter, 1 epistle, ii. 1. speaks of some false teachers, who *privily* bring into the Church damnable heresies, and seduce many to follow their pernicious ways. Jude, speaking of the same persons, describes them *as creeping in unawares;* in a secret and subtle manner. This *coming in privily*, and *creeping in unawares*, answers to our Saviour's description of them, as not entering into the sheepfold *by the door*, but climbing up *some other way*. It especially intends their assuming the office of teachers, without the approbation of those, whom the gospel has constituted judges of their qualifications. The apostle Jude illustrates their character, by comparing them to the ancient *Corahites. They have perished in the gainsaying of Corah.* The story alluded to is in the 16th chap. of Numbers. Corah and his companions took upon them to offer incense, and

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exercise the functions of the priesthood. They murmured against the family of Aaron, which had been consecrated to this holy service. They said, 'Ye take too much upon you seeing all the congregation are holy, and the Lord is among them; wherefore lift ye up yourselves above the congregation?' They called 'the standing order' of ministers a tyranny, a usurpation of rights common to all the Lord's people: They pretended, that every man, who pleased, might officiate in the priesthood. Moses says, 'God hath brought you near to him to do the service of the tabernacle, and do you seek the priesthood also? Ye take too much upon you, ye sons of Levi.' How their presumption issued, you well remember. Now the apostle says, these false teachers, who crept into the church unawares, were guilty of the gainsaying of Corah. They had assumed the sacred office like him, uncalled and unauthorized; were guilty of his presumption, and exposed to his condemnation.

It will perhaps be said, 'In the apostles' time, there were some, who had an imme-

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diate call from the Spirit to preach the gospel; and this may be the case still; and if a man is moved by the Spirit, he must obey.'

But if the Spirit moves a man to preach the gospel, it will undoubtedly move him to act conformably to the rules of the gospel, and to seek an introduction to the work, in the manner which the gospel prescribes. The divine Spirit never dictates to the heart a line of conduct, which it has forbidden in the word. They, who despise and neglect the gospel method of introduction to the sacred office, under pretence of some inward motion, are not influenced by the *Holy* Spirit, but instigated by a spirit of a very different character.

There is no instance, in the new testament, of any man's assuming the office of a preacher *merely* on an *internal* call of the Spirit. The Holy Ghost commanded Ananias to go and declare to Paul, that he was chosen to preach Christ's name: And the Holy Ghost said to the prophets and teachers at Antioch, 'Separate me Barnabas and Paul to the work, to which I have called

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them.' But we find not, that Paul or Barnabas, or any other of the primitive preachers, ran to the work before they were sent, under pretence of an internal call of the Spirit, which nobody knew but themselves. In the present day the tables are turned. It is the *preacher* now who is directed by the Spirit; not they who are to set him apart to the work. If it could be supposed, that one might have such a secret command from the Spirit, this is only evidence to *himself*: It will not warrant *others* to *attend* on him; it can therefore answer no purpose. What endless confusion would follow from admitting such pretences! Any man, who is dishonest enough, may pretend such a call; and who shall contradict him? What order can there be in the church? The man may be ignorant, immoral or heretical.—But who shall judge, censure and silence him? He still pleads a call from the Spirit, and he will be judged by no man.

If one pretends such a special divine direction, as his warrant to preach, let him manifest it by miracles, as the apostle mani-

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fested their commission. Miracles have ceased, and so have all immediate revelations; and the man, who now pretends to them, is a designing imposter, or deluded enthusiast.

If such arrogant pretensions should be accompanied, as they usually are, with an open contempt of human learning, and of that *study* and *attendance on reading*, which Paul enjoins on the minister, we may justly suspect, they are held up as a substitute for real qualifications, a cover for ignorance, and an excuse for laziness.

In the apostles' time, there were instances of the Spirit's designating the persons to be ordained to the ministry; but it is evident, that this manner of designation was not to be continued in the church, because the Holy Ghost has taken care to furnish the church with standing rules for her conduct in this matter. Timothy, who was ordained by the elders of the church, is commanded to commit the same office which he had received, to faithful men, who should be able to teach others. But how shall

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Timothy know, who are these able, and faithful men? Shall he ordain every man, who says, The Spirit moves him to preach? Or will the Spirit immediately point out to Timothy the man who is to be ordained? No: He must inquire into the qualifications of those who offer themselves to the work. Paul says to him, 'If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, sober, of good behaviour, apt to teach, not given to wine, not a novice; moreover he must have a good report of them that are without.'— Surely, if Paul had supposed, that the Spirit would immediately and supernaturally direct in this matter, he would not have instructed Timothy so particularly, what qualifications he must find in those, whom he ordained to be teachers in the church.

The instructions given to Titus are the same. 'For this cause I left thee in Crete, that thou mayest ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: If any man be blameless, sober, just, holy, temperate, holding fast the faithful word, and able by sound

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doctrine to exhort, and to convince gainsayers.'

Since the Spirit of God has given in the gospel, sufficient directions concerning this matter; to these let us attend, and look for no other.

It has been urged in favour of private brethren's teaching in the church, That the apostle says to the Corinthians, "*Ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and be comforted.*" 1 epistle, xiv. 31.

But could he intend, that all the Christians in Corinth might *prophesy* or *preach?* By no means; for then we must suppose that even *women* were to commence preachers, if they pleased, contrary to his express instructions both here, and in his first epistle to Timothy. By *all* he means *all the prophets*, as will be evident, if you take the whole sentence in its connexion. 'Let the *prophets* speak, two or three, and let the other judge. If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace; for ye may all prophesy one by one.' In the Corinthian church there were many

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endued with spiritual gifts; who, being ambitious to display their gifts, used to speak several at once, to the confusion of one another, and of the whole assembly. To correct this disorder, the apostle says, 'If any man speak, let it be by two; or, at the most, by three,' i. e. Let not more than two or three speak in the same meeting; and let not these speak all at once, 'but by course,' one after another: 'Let the *prophets* speak two or three, in succession, and let the other judge.' 'And if, while one is prophesying, any thing be revealed to another,' i. e. another *prophet*, 'let the first hold his peace.' Let the first finish his discourse, and cease from speaking, before the other begins. 'For ye may all prophesy one by one. If ye will observe order in your assemblies, all the *prophets* may have opportunity to speak; ye need not interrupt one another. And do not pretend, that ye are so overpowered by the divine influence, that you cannot refrain, but must immediately give vent to the fervid ebullitions of grace; for the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. God

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is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.' *Prophets* were an order of public teachers in the primitive church: *These* only are the persons, who, the apostle says, may all prophesy. The words therefore, far from allowing, plainly forbid private Christians to start up and teach in religious assemblies.*

* The Apostle says, 1 Cor. xi. 5. 'Every woman, that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered, dishonoreth her head.' Hence some have inferred, that women were permitted, in public assemblies, to pray and prophesy, or preach, if they would modestly cover their heads. But this inference cannot be admitted in opposition to the Apostle's explicit and repeated prohibitions of such a practice.

In the church of Corinth there were women, who, under real or pretended inspiration, took upon them to speak in religious assemblies. In speaking they assumed a bold masculine air, throwing off their *veils*, which, according to the custom of the time, were a badge of female modesty, and a token of subjection to their husbands. The Apostle, according to his usual caution in matters of delicacy, before he expressly condemns the practice, adverts to the impropriety of women's appearing with forward and assuming airs in public assemblies. 'Every woman, that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered, dishonoreth her head; for that is all one, as if she were shaven. For if the women be not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered.'

Now if it be not decent or proper for a woman to appear *uncovered* in a mixed assembly, it is not decent or proper for her

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I will mention another passage, which has been sometimes perverted to justify private brethren in assuming the office of teachers. *At the time* of Stephen's martyrdom, *there was great persecution against the church, which was at Jerusalem, and they were all scattered abroad through the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.*——*And*

to *speak* or *preach* in such an assembly. The reason against the former, is equally a reason against the latter; viz. its inconsistency with the modesty and subjection, which become the sex. The Apostle calls it 'usurping authority over the men.' Every publick speaker, while speaking, claims a kind of superiority to the audience—assumes the teacher, and lays aside the subjection of the learner.

The Apostle therefore, by requiring the women to be veiled in religious assemblies in token of subordination, implicitly forbids her to preach. If she may not prophesy unveiled, she may not prophesy at all. For there would be a gross inconsistency in wearing the veil and assuming the preacher.

Having corrected the indecency of a woman's uncovering her head to prophesy, he afterward, at a proper place in the epistle, expressly forbids the practice itself. 'Let your women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home.' The same restriction he injoins in his first epistle to Timothy. 'Let the women learn in silence with all subjection; for I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man; but to be in silence.'

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they, that were scattered abroad, went every where preaching the word. Acts 8.

But are we to suppose that the *all*, who were scattered abroad, were all the *members* of the Church in Jerusalem, and that *all these* went every where preaching? This would be absurd; for then we must suppose the *women* turned preachers. The church at Jerusalem was, at this time, very large. We read of three thousands at one time, and five thousands at another, converted to the Christian faith; besides other considerable accessions. A great proportion of these were in, and about Jerusalem. That all the *believers* in this city should go forth to preach, is not supposable: So many were not needed, nor could so many be employed, in the regions of Judea and Samaria, and the other places whither they went; for they preached to Jews only. And if the fire of persecution was so hot that no professed believer could live in Jerusalem, why were not the apostles scattered among the rest?

It is certain that the church in Jerusalem was not dispersed; for still there were in

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Judea *brethren* and *apostles;* and in the *city* there were *devout men, who carried Stephen to his burial;* and *disciples* to whom Paul *essayed to join himself,* after he came from Damascus. Yea, we are expressly told, that when they, who, by this persecution, were scattered abroad, had gone as far as Phenice, Cyprus and Antioch, preaching the word with success, *tidings of these things came to the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem.* Acts viii. 2—ix. 26—xi. 1, 19, 22.

Since there were still *brethren* with the *apostles,* and since we still find in Jerusalem *devout men, disciples,* and a *church; the all,* who were scattered abroad, cannot be all the *Christians* or *believers* in the city.

Who then were *these all?* Doubtless they were *the hundred and twenty disciples,* who had companied together, while Christ went in and out among them; and on whom the Holy Ghost had lately fallen. *These* are mentioned in the first and second chapters of the Acts, and are, once and again, called *the all. These* were assembled together, when a successor to Judas was elected.

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They were *all* together in one place on the day of pentecost. On *these* the Holy Ghost was shed forth, and cloven tongues, like as of fire, sat on *each of them*. They were *all* filled with the Holy Ghost and spake with tongues.

Grotius, *Lightfoot* and *Whitby*, say, that '*they all*, who were now filled with the Holy Ghost, were all the hundred and twenty.' This appears to have been a received opinion in the ancient church. *Jerom*, *Chrysostom* and *Oecumenius*, observe, that 'the Holy Ghost fell on the hundred and twenty to complete the prophecy of Joel.' *Whitby* says, 'It was not the whole church, or body of the laiety, that was scattered abroad, but the hundred and eight, who were full of the Holy Ghost; the persecution aiming chiefly at those, who were such as Stephen was.—'

These were now plainly authorized to preach the gospel, having, in a public manner, received this supernatural gift, and being, according to Christ's promise, endued with power from on high; and therefore,

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when they were scattered from Jerusalem, they went every where preaching the word.

But whoever these preachers are supposed to be, one thing is undeniable; they were endued with miraculous gifts and powers, which were the publick seal of their divine commission. For it is expressly said, Acts xi. 21, 'The *Hand* of the *Lord* was with them.' This phrase is, more than once, used by Luke for the supernatural and miraculous gifts of the Spirit. When Peter and John and their company prayed, that God would *stretch out his Hand to heal* and to enable them to *do signs and wonders in Christ's name;* they, in answer to their prayer, *were filled with the Holy Ghost.* Acts iv. 30, 31. These men went forth to preach with a public warrant from heaven. Their example, therefore, will by no means justify private Christians, who have no such warrant, in going every where to preach the word. If any, despising the ordinary mission appointed by God, plead an extraordinary commission to preach every where, let them shew the extraordinary evidences of

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this commission by miraculous gifts and assistances. God never sends men to do his work, without some testimony sufficient to justify others in receiving them.*

* It has been asked, 'What evidence we have, that Apollos, before he was received in the character of a Christian preacher, had been approved by the elders of churches.' It is sufficient to answer, we have evidence from the rule and practice of the apostles already illustrated.

We are not to expect a particular account of every ordination, any more than of every baptism, in the church; and in neither case can the silence of scripture, in certain instances, be urged as an argument against an established usage.

There is no evidence that Apollos acted as a Christian preacher in the church, much less, that he was acknowledged in this character before he received regular approbation. When he first came to Ephesus, Acts xviii. he knew the way of the Lord, only as far as John's baptism, or doctrine, had led him He knew that the kingdom of heaven, or the time of the Messiah's apperance, was now come. But that Jesus of Nazareth was this Messiah, had risen from the dead, and shed down the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, he had not been instructed. He first began to speak in the Jewish synagogue, probably, as many others did, by invitation, or permission of the ruler of the synagogue. He spake not as a Christian preacher, but rather as a learned and pious Jew, who was looking for redemption in Israel. For it is expressly remarked, that *he knew only the baptism of John.* Aquila, who had been instructed by Paul, and whom Paul left at Ephesus, when he went from thence, and whom some suppose to have been ordained a preacher by this apostle, perceiving that Apollos knew only the doctrine of John, 'took him and expounded to him the way of the Lord more perfectly.' And according-

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It must, by this time be manifest to you, that no man can claim a right to officiate in the character of a minister or teacher in the church, until he has been approbated and recommended to the work by the elders of churches.

I shall now shew, that whenever ministers or preachers travel into parts, in which

ly we find, that when Apollos went to Achaia, 'he helped the believers, and mightily convinced the Jews, shewing from the scriptures, that Jesus was the Christ.' Before he went into Achaia, 'the brethren' in Ephesus 'wrote to the disciples, exhorting them to receive him.' As there were now many believers, so doubtless there were also elders or ministers in Ephesus. We find, not long after this, Acts xx. that there was a number of elders in that city, who had the oversight of the church there; and probably of the churches in other parts of Asia; that they had been there for some time, and had been acquainted with Paul's ministry, 'from the first day that he went into Asia.' It is certain then that there were elders in Ephesus, as early as the time when Apollos was there. These probably were the brethren, or at least among the brethren, who recommended him to the disciples in Achaia. For *brethren* is a term often used for *elders* of the church. It is by no means supposable that Apollos should be known to none but private Christians. So learned and eloquent a man, who had read and spoken openly in the synagogue, and been instructed by Aquila, would certainly become acquainted with the elders. If he was known to them, doubtless they concurred in this recommendation; and if they recommended him, they had previously approved him in the character in which he went to Achaia.

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they are not known, they ought to carry with them competent credentials; and that no man has a right to act, and Christians have no right to receive a man, in this sacred character, unless he exhibits sufficient testimony of his being vested with it. This is a just conclusion from the position already proved; and is farther evident from the uniform practice in the apostles' time.

Paul, after he had preached Christ for some time in Damascus, went to Jerusalem, and essayed to join himself to the disciples there: But they were all afraid of him, and *believed* not that he was a disciple. Acts ix. So cautious were they not to receive one, who had not given them sufficient evidence of the truth of his pretensions. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles, the proper judges in cases of this nature, and declared to them, how Paul had seen Christ in the way, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Christ; and on this testimony of Barnabas, who was himself a minister of Christ, they received him; and he was with them,

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coming in and going out at Jerusalem. You will observe, he associated with the *apostles.* He did not shun them: He submitted to be examined and judged by them; and being accepted, he consorted and cooperated with them. How differently he conducted from imposters and deceivers, who choose to avoid the company of the regular ministers of Christ!

In the apostolic times, the preachers of the gospel, when they travelled from place to place, carried with them written credentials. Paul says, 2 Cor. iii. *Need we, as some others, letters of commendation from you, or epistles of commendation to you? Ye are our epistle, known and read of all men.* His words import, that *others*, that ministers in general, when they travelled beyond the circle of their acquaintance, had occasion for letters of commendation, although he himself was, by this time, known so universally in the churches, and especially in Corinth, that he needed no such letters.

Judas and Silas are very particularly recommended to the church in Antioch by

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the apostles, elders, and church in Jerusalem. Acts xv. 25. They are called 'chosen men; men who had hazarded their lives for the name of Christ,' and whose information might be received with full credit. 'And they, *being prophets also themselves*, exhorted the brethren with many words.' Verse 32.

When Timothy went from Philippi to Corinth, to carry Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul, in the epistle which he sent by him, recommends him as a minister, in these words; chap. xvi. 'If Timothy come, see that he may be among you without fear; for he worketh the work of God, as I also do. Let no man therefore despise him.' He recommends him also to the Thessalonians. 1 epistle, iii. 2. 'We have sent Timotheus our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ to establish you.——'

When Paul was at Rome, he wrote a letter to the Ephesian Christians, and sent it by the hand of Tychicus; and, that they might receive Tychicus without distrust, Paul thus recommends him; 'That ye may

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know my affairs, and how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother, and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things, whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose.' Chap. vi. In like manner he recommends him to the Colossians in his letter to them. 'All my state shall Tychicus declare, who is a beloved brother, faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord.' Chap. iv.

He commends Timothy and Epaphroditus to the Philippians. Chap. ii. 'I trust to send Timotheus shortly unto you—Ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he had served with me in the gospel—And I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and companion in labour and fellowsoldier—I send him—receive him in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such in reputation.'

Paul tells the Collossians, chap. iv. 10, that 'concerning Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, they had already received commandment; and if he came to them, they were to receive him.'

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When the eloquent, learned and fervent Apollos, who had spoken boldly at Ephesus, and taught diligently the way of the Lord, was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him. Acts xviii.

John, in his third epistle, recommends Demetrius, as one 'who had a good report of all men, and of the truth itself;' and as one, 'of whom he could himself bear testimony with great confidence.'

Peter, in his first epistle, which he wrote to the Jewish Christians, dispersed through the provinces of Asia, fails not to make honourable mention of Sylvanus, who carried the epistle to them. 'By Sylvanus, a faithful brother, have I written.'

Yea, we find, not only ministers, but private Christians, recommended to the fellowship of saints. Paul commends Onesimus to the Collossians, 'as a faithful and beloved brother;' and Phebe to the Romans, 'as a member of the church in Cenchrea,' and exhorts them 'to receive her.'

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But I have already dwelt too long on this argument. I am sure, it must by this time, be exceedingly plain to you all, that we ought not only to reject those, who without regular approbation, have assumed the office of teachers in the church; but cautiously to avoid *strangers*, who, while they pretend to be ministers, exhibit no proper credentials of their ministerial, or even Christian character, and of their regular standing in the church of Christ. The church in Thyatira is severely reproved by Christ himself, 'because she suffered those to teach, who called themselves prophets;' but, that they were such, gave no better evidence, than their own word. On the other hand, the church in Ephesus is commended, 'because she could not bear them who were evil; and tried them who said they were apostles, but were not, and found them liars.' Revelations ii. 2, 20.

From the preceding observations it appears, that in the primitive church there were two sorts of ministers; *extraordinary*, as apostles, prophets and evangelists; and *ordina-*

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ry, as pastors and teachers. The *former* who were employed in spreading the gospel and planting churches in the world, were endued with miraculous powers, by which they were enabled, as well to authenticate, as to execute, their extraordinary commission. This sort of ministers, and this kind of evidence were to continue, only so long as the state of the church required them. When the canon of revelation should be completed, 'then prophesies were to fail, tongues were to cease, and knowledge,' as an immediate, supernatural gift, 'was to vanish away.' 1 Cor. xiii. 8.

The *latter*, or *ordinary* ministers, were stated pastors, who laboured in word and doctrine, for the edification of the churches, over which they were made overseers.—These appear not to have generally possessed miraculous powers. They were to prove their ministerial authority by ordinary evidence; as by a solemn separation to their work before many witnesses; and, when occasion required, by a recommendation from known ministers, or churches. This

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order of religious teachers is to continue in the church to the end of the world. Eph. iv. 11, 13.

All ministers must now appear in one or other of these characters. If they come as ordinary teachers, they are to exhibit the ordinary evidence of having been regularly approbated to their work, and of their good standing in the church. If they come as extraordinary ministers, pretending to be supernaturally called to, and endued for their work, and hence claiming authority to go every where preaching the word, let them produce the great, divine seal of their high commission by incontestible miracles: Otherwise we are not to receive them, nor bid them, God speed.

It may be asked, 'What if a minister regularly ordained, should afterwards become grossly heretical, negligent, or immoral? Is he not to be called *a false teacher?*—Rather perhaps he is to be called a corrupt, wicked, or slothful servant. His guilt is not a disorderly intrusion into office, but a criminal perversion of, and unfaithfulness in his

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office. He is not, however, by any means to be tolerated in his wickedness; but the measures prescribed in the gospel are to be applied for his amendment. In case of contumacy, or incorrigibleness, he is to be rejected by a public sentence of the elders of churches. Until trial and conviction, he is in regular standing, for no man is to be condemned without trial. If in the introduction of ministers, gospel order is observed, as it generally is in our standing churches, there is little danger, that one grossly vicious, or essentially erroneous, will long be retained in office, because he will be subject to trial and censure. But if every man may, at pleasure, assume the ministerial office, and run whither he lists; and people will countenance the assumption, by attending his ministrations, wherever he goes, there can be no security. For who shall displace from office the man who claims an independent right to assume and retain it? He will submit to no judicature; he will spurn every admonition and censure; discarded in one place, he will carry his impositions to ano-

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ther; and none knows where the mischief will end. Those Christians, who imprudently follow and encourage vagrant, unknown, unrecommended teachers, do their utmost to subvert the discipline of the churches, and to break down the barriers which the gospel has placed against the irruption of ignorance, errour and vice. *Christ's sheep will not follow a stranger; they will flee from him, for they know not the voice of strangers.*

DISCOURSE II.

I PROCEED now to point out to you some other marks of false teachers. On these I shall not have occasion greatly to enlarge.

II. Our Saviour tells us, 'False prophets come *in sheep's clothing*, but inwardly they are *ravening wolves*. Ye shall know them by their fruits.'

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They will make great *professions*, and perhaps, for a while, exhibit some plausible *appearance* of humility, peaceableness, meekness, and indifference to the world. They will declare, that they have no party designs, sinister views, or selfish aims; that they are only solicitous to promote your spiritual and eternal interest; while their real intention is to divide, scatter and devour you. You may possibly be deceived at first by their fair pretensions, and be carried away by their dissimulation. But observe them carefully, and you will soon be undeceived. Suppose, they should meet with opposition, or provocation, or be disappointed in their views; then see whether they retain the *lamblike* gentleness of which they boasted. No: You may now begin to discern the wolf: Now they betray their pride, passion and resentment: Now they break you into parties, that they may catch some of you. They may appear modest and diffident at first; but suppose, they should find their influence increased by the number of their adherents and followers;

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then see whether they are so moderate in their views; whether they are content with small things? No: They will leap into one fold and another for new prey. A good shepherd attends to his own proper charge: The wolf is a rapacious, prowling animal: Not satisfied with taking out of one flock, he roams from flock to flock, and can never have enough.

III. False teachers bring in dangerous heresies privily, unawares, and with cunning craftiness. Eph. iv. 14. 2 Peter ii. 1. Jude iv.

It is not every erroneous doctrine that marks one to be an impostor. In this imperfect state an entire uniformity of sentiment is not to be expected. In those differences of opinion which affect not the essence of religion, candour and forbearance will take place among the virtuous and discerning. Errours, which mar the substance, and defeat the design of the gospel, ought to awaken the concern, and warm the zeal of a Christian. To draw with precision the line, and mark with exactness the bounda-

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ries between these different kinds of errours, will undoubtedly be a matter of difficulty. Though the extremes may be glaring, yet where the shades mingle, it is a nice eye that can discriminate. But whatever may be the errours taught, craft and artifice in teaching them are always to be condemned. The man who assumes the character of a *Christian* teacher, will not openly avow doctrines directly and palpably subversive of the gospel; for among Christians, these doctrines, in their naked and undisguised form, will not be received. The sacred writers, therefore, make a subtle and insidious *manner* of propagating errours, no less than the errours themselves, a mark of imposters. Of the artifice with which they proceed the gospel has given us warning. They usually begin with smaller errours, and gradually advance to greater. They open not themselves fully at once, but with caution and reserve. They will not alarm you by calling in question the grand principles and doctrines of religion: They rather choose to lead you on gently, step by step, from one

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errour to another. The apostle tells Timothy, 'Evil men and seducers wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.' In this respect, he compares them to the first deceiver. 2 Cor. x. Speaking of false apostles, he says, 'They are deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ, and into ministers of righteousness, even as Satan himself was transformed into an angel of light.' He expresseth his concern for the Corinthians, 'Lest, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so their minds should be corrupted from the simplicity, that is in Christ.' The Serpent beguiled Eve, not by bold and direct temptations, but by sly and artful enticements. He first inquired, whether God had forbidden the use of *every* tree. When he was told, that there was a grant of *all* the trees except *one*, which was guarded with a threatening of death; he replied, 'Ye shall not *surely* die. There is not that danger, which you apprehend.' He next intimated some peculiar advantage in eating of this particular tree. 'Your eyes shall be opened, and

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ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.' Probably he insinuated, that he was an angel of light sent from heaven to take off the restraint. Thus, by degrees seduced, the woman cast a longing eye on the fruit: The sight inflamed her desire: This, concurring with his suggestions, prevailed on her to take and eat.

In like manner the ministers of Satan are cautious not to startle men at first by too bold suggestions. They will affect, in most points, to conform to the ministers of righteousness; to think as they think, or not greatly to differ from them; and only to serve the same important interest, which *they* are serving. They will suit themselves to all companies; and, as the apostle says, 'their word will be yea, and nay;' one thing or another, just according to the humours and notions of the people they converse with; until, they imagine, they have gained their confidence, and seduced them so far, that it is impossible to renew them again to repentance: Then they will venture more boldly

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to discover their sentiments and open their designs.

IV. Unruly and vain talkers and deceivers are described as privately tampering with people of less knowledge and discernment, because these are more easily deluded.

They choose not, in the first instance, to practise on those who are of full age, and who, by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. They shun such, lest their designs should be discovered, and their errours exposed. They rather attempt to seduce the young, the weak, the wavering, the discontented; that, having gained these, they may more easily make impressions on the minds of those who are connected with them. The old serpent first applied to Eve, whom having seduced, he by her influence drew the man into disobedience. The same artifice is practised still. Corrupt teachers, we are told, 'beguile *unstable* souls;' and 'creep into houses and lead captive *silly women*, laden with sins, and led away with divers lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowl-

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edge of the truth; thus 'they subvert *whole houses*, teaching things, which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.' In this sense they are said 'to follow the way, and to hold the doctrine of Balaam,' who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel by seducing them to marry the daughters of Moab, that by this idolatrous connexion, they might be enticed to eat things sacrificed to idols. 2 Peter ii. 14, 15.—2 Tim. iii. 6.—Titus i. 11.—and Rev. ii. 14, compared with Numb. xxv. 1, 2.

V. Another mark of false teachers is an implacable malignity against the standing, regular ministers of the gospel.

Read the epistle of Jude, and Paul's epistle to the Corinthians and Galatians, and you will see this spirit to be characteristic of them. They not only censure some unworthy characters but declaim against the whole order, and spare no pains to infuse into people's minds prejudices against all that belong to it. Jude says of those ungodly men, who, in his day, had crept in unawares; 'They speak evil of things, which

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they know not'—slander ministers and churches, with which they are utterly unacquainted. 'They despise dominion and speak evil of dignities.' The false apostles reproached Paul, not only as a man of diminutive figure and contemptible speech, but as one that was carnal, walked after the flesh, and preached only for wages. But they commended themselves, as making the gospel free, and as preaching only from love to souls, without a desire of wordly gain. And what was their aim?—The apostle tells us; and he was well acquainted with them. 'They zealously affect you, but not well: Yea, they would exclude *us*, that ye may affect *them*.' Gal. iv. 17. marg. Their hypocritical pretensions of making the gospel without charge, and their perpetual clamour against Paul for taking wages of the churches, were the reasons, why he so often and so largely stated and proved the right of ministers to live by the gospel, and the obligation of Christians to support them. But while he claimed a right to a liberal maintenance, he tells the Corinthians, he had wa-

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ved this right among them, 'taking *wages* of other churches to do them service.' And this he did, on charitable and prudential reasons, 'that he might cut off occasion from the false apostles, who desired occasion, that wherein they gloried, they might be found even as he.' They *gloried*, as false teachers commonly do, in making the gospel free: But Paul says, they are 'deceitful workers.' He acted openly and without disguise. He asserted his *right*, but remitted the *exercise* of it in Corinth. They were vain talkers and deceivers; they denied the right, and yet exercised it in a surreptitious manner. While they gloried in preaching freely, they actually took of the Corinthians so extravagantly, that they even '*devoured* them, and brought them into *bondage*.' And yet there were some in Corinth, who, while they joined in the clamour against Paul as an hireling, would patiently bear any thing, and every thing from these deceivers. 'Have I committed an offence,' says he, 'because I preached to *you* the gospel of God freely?' 'But ye suffer fools gladly; for ye suffer, if

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a man bring you into bondage; if a man devour you; if a man take of you; if a man exalt himself; if a man smite you on the face.' But how did these deceitful workers carry on their design of taking wages, while they pretended to have none? It seems they employed accomplices to take, or rather extort gifts for them: And then, to cover the artifice more deeply, and prevent a suspicion of their privity, they accused Paul of this duplicity. But he utterly disavows it, and appeals to the Corinthians for the falsity of the charge. He says, 'I was not burdensome to you;—for I seek not yours, but you—very gladly will I spend and be spent for you.'—'But be it so; I did not burden you, yet being crafty, I caught you with guile.' i. e. These deceitful workers, conscious of their own artifice, will say, 'Though I did not burden you myself, yet I craftily employed others to take of you for me.' He despises the insinuation. 'Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent to you? I desired Titus, and with him I sent a brother. Did Titus make a gain of you?

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Walked we not in the same spirit, and in the same steps?' Paul 'renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness.'—But these deceivers, 'through covetousness, with feigned words made merchandise of their hearers.' 1 Cor. ix. and 2 Cor. x. and seq. and 2 Peter ii. 3.

This leads me to notice another mark which the apostle mentions.

VI. This sort of teachers are guided by no *line*, and confined to no *measure*; but run from place to place, enter into other men's labours, and build on other men's foundation.

Wherever the apostles came preaching the gospel, they exhibited full evidence, as of their general commission, so of their particular warrant to preach in that place. When any sought a proof of Christ speaking in Paul, he was able to answer, 'The signs of an apostle have been wrought among you—and we have been thoroughly made manifest among you in all things.' He says to the Corinthians, 'We dare not make ourselves of the number, nor compare ourselves with

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some who commend themselves'—We dare not imitate the arrogance and ostentation of your false apostles. 'We will not boast of things without our measure, but according to the measure of the rule which God hath distributed to us, a measure to reach even unto you. For we stretch not ourselves beyond, nor boast of things without our measure, that is, of other men's labours: But we have hope, when your faith is increased, that we shall be enlarged by you, according to our rule, to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you; and not to boast, in another man's line, of things made ready to our hand.' 2 Cor. x. 12—16. How different was Paul's conduct from that of these false apostles? They could shew no commission to preach to the Corinthians, nor indeed any where else: But he could manifest his apostolic commission, and his particular warrant to preach in Corinth; for when he was ordained to preach to the Gentiles, a measure was assigned him which included Achaia. They moved by no line, by no rule, but leaped from one church to

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another: He went on orderly in preaching the gospel and planting churches among the Gentiles, from Judea through all the interjacent provinces, until he came to Corinth; and he hoped still to proceed farther according to his line. They came and perverted those churches, where the faith had been already preached, and so could only boast of things made ready to their hands. Instead of founding churches, they only formed sects out of churches already founded: He preached the gospel where no other apostle had before been employed; and erected churches, not as separate parties, but as provinces of Christ's general kingdom, that there might be no schism in the body. He speaks to the same purpose in his letter to the Romans. 'I will not dare to speak of,' or assume to myself, 'any of those things, which Christ hath not wrought by me.'—'Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ is named, lest I should build on another man's foundation.' Rom. xv. 18, 20.

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Ministers, you see, are to have their respective lines and measures, within which they must move. They are not to be 'clouds without water, driven about with wind' in every direction; but clouds fraught with heavenly treasures, and advancing in a steady course over the thirsty ground. 'Their doctrine should drop as the rain, and distil as the dew, as the small rain, on the tender herb, and the showers on the grass.' They are not to be 'wandering stars,' but stars confined in their appointed orbits. They are not to cross each others lines, and interfere in their motions; but, like the heavenly system, to run, each in his proper circuit, around the common centre. They are to contribute, each in his sphere, to the general order and harmony. They are to be fellowworkers to the kingdom of God.—Paul charges the elders of the church, 'that they take heed to the flock, over which the Holy Ghost has made them overseers, to feed the church of God.' Acts xx. 18.—The caution given by Peter, 'Be ye not busybodies in other men's matters,' is pe-

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culiarly applicable to, and perhaps especially intended for ministers, whom he particularly addresses in the precedent and subsequent verses. The original phrase literally imports, *Let none of you—act as a bishop in anothers province.* 1 Peter iv. 15. It is a plain mark of a false teacher, to enter upon, and pull down other men's works, that he may build on their ground: To stretch himself beyond his measure, or to move without any line of direction. In this respect Peter and Jude compare the corrupt teachers, in that day, to clouds hurled about with a tempest—to raging waves of the sea—to floating meteors, of strong, but transient glare, to which is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.*

* The Prophet Isaiah, chap. xxx. verse 20, says, "*Thine eyes shall see thy teachers.*" This is a blessing peculiarly promised to the church of *Israel*, after she had surmounted her greatest trials; and therefore most properly belongs to the spiritual Israel, or gospel church; whose teachers should not dwell, like the Levites, in separate cities, but in the midst of her, so that she might see them, be conversant with them, know their ability and fidelity in their office, have their example before her eyes, and enjoy their presence and counsels in all her troubles. Such is evi-

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From the apostolic example and instructions above stated, we plainly see, that it is disorderly and irregular for one minister to enter into the charge of another, without his

dently the design of the gospel ministry. Accordingly, except a few evangelists, who were extraordinary officers, and who had a work in some respects, peculiar to themselves, the Christian churches, in the first ages, had their *known* officers, their *settled* bishops, who resided, each in the church of which he was made overseer. Such a man was elder or bishop, of this church, and such a man of another. Every congregation had its own pastor; every large city had its body of pastors. Christians enjoyed a personal acquaintance with their minister; fully knew his faith, doctrine, manner of life, and had access to him for advice on all occasions; and he, standing in a special and endearing relation to them, naturally cared for their state. The evidence of this appears in all parts of the acts and the epistles. The church of Ephesus had her own overseers, set apart, by the Holy Ghost, for her particular service, to which they were commanded to take heed. The apostles ordained elders in *every* church. Titus was left in Crete, that he might ordain elders in *every* city, and set in order things which were wanting. The churches in Asia had each her distinct *angel*, or *pastor*, to whom John delivers a message from Christ, to be communicated to the churches. These observations prove, that a man who chooses to officiate as a preacher, where he is unknown; who wanders from town to town, and from state to state, keeping his external call and qualifications out of sight, carries a most glaring mark of a false teacher. And whatever pretentions he makes of zeal for Christ, and love to souls, he is to be regarded with the same distrust, as a rambling mountebank, who professes a supernatural skill to heal men's diseases, or predict their fortunes. Sectaries, who

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knowledge and approbation, and there collect assemblies, appoint lectures, and perform official services. This is acting in the manner and in the character of those, whom the apostles condemn as false teachers. It is equally irregular for a private member of an organized society, under the charge of a stated minister, to invite and introduce, without the consent of such minister, either into the pulpit, or into a private house, any stranger, or favourite in the character of a preacher, and call the attendance of the people.

The kingdom of Christ is as orderly a society as the kingdoms of the world. The minister chosen by a church and society,

are fixed in no one place; who exhibit no authentic credentials; who preach not on the instituted day, in the stated place, under the patronage of settled ministers; but in contempt of all order, creep into corners, call private lectures, endeavour to fascinate their hearers with the charms of novelty, and, before they can well be known, flee away, and give place to a successor of the same description, come not from the good Shepherd; but are those thieves and robbers, who come to steal and destroy, and of whom the great Shepherd has warned us to beware. To such the porter may not open; and such the sheep may not hear nor follow." *Letter to the Author from a Friend.*

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and ordained at their request by elders whom they have invited, is a bishop, an overseer, a watchman, and officer of Christ. And he is to take heed, in a particular manner, to that flock over which he is made an overseer, and to guard it against the intrusion of grievous wolves. This minister is responsible, as for his own preaching, so also for the preaching of those whom he introduces to his people. If he introduces men unauthorised and unqualified, he, as an officer of Christ, is liable to complaint, trial and censure. If he persists in such conduct, he may justly be deposed from office. This is the security of the people against imposition from evil men and seducers. But where is the responsibility of the private man? He holds no office in the church, and can be deposed from none. If one man may, at his option, call a stranger, an itinerant or a favourite to officiate, as a minister, so may another, and so may every one; and none of them will consider themselves as responsible for their own conduct, or the conduct of

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their preacher. And where is the security of the people, or the order of the society?

In the church of Thyatira, persons, assuming a prophetic character, were permitted to *teach* and to seduce Christ's servants. But where was the fault?—The fault was in the *angel* or *pastor* of the church. He was reproved, because he *suffered* such persons to teach and seduce the people of his charge. It was his duty, and it was in his power to have prevented the evil. For his people had not so far departed from the order of the gospel, or so deeply sunk into ignorance or corruption, as to take the work of their pastor into their own hands, or introduce preachers without his knowledge, or follow intruders whom he disapproved. The censure falls particularly on him, because he *suffered* such persons to teach.

Some perhaps will say, 'Our minister may unreasonably exclude worthy and good men, whom we wish to hear.' Is it not as likely, that you will unreasonably introduce unworthy and bad men, whom you ought not to hear. When you choose to settle a

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minister, as your watchman, and as a defender of the gospel, you suppose you can place some confidence in him. In his office and station, he can ordinarily judge, better than you, concerning the credentials and qualifications of those who present themselves as preachers. He has authority, and it is his duty, in a case of doubt, to demand their evidences. If they refuse to exhibit the evidences demanded, he ought to consider the men as imposters. You may possibly, in a particular case, have information concerning a stranger, which your pastor has not. Go then, and communicate it to him; but take not his authority into your own hands, unless you can take his responsibility too. If his conduct should be such, in any part of his ministerial office, as to render him unworthy of confidence, he would be unworthy of his station. And let him be brought to a fair and regular trial. But never let the people desert him to follow strangers. The pastor of the church in Ephesus was commended by Christ, because 'he tried them, who said they were apostles, and

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were not, and found them liars.' Take heed that you condemn not that prudence and caution in your minister, which Christ commended in a minister at Ephesus.

VII. They are considered by the apostles as false teachers, who cause divisions and offences in churches of Christ.

The gospel every where inculcates peace and unity among Christians; and represents separations and party attachments, as an evidence that they are carnal. Errours and corruptions in a church are no reason, why we should withdraw from her communion, until they plainly appear to be fundamental and incurable; they are rather a reason, why we should be watchful to reform the things that are amiss, and to strengthen the things that remain. There can scarcely be a more striking indication of hypocrisy and carnality in a professor of religion, than his separating from the communion of a church, on pretence of corruptions or ungodly members in it, when he himself has never made one single attempt to purge out the corruptions, or to reclaim or remove the ungodly members.

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As there ought to be regular fellowship among the members of the same church; so there ought to be friendly intercourse among sister churches. The body of Christ is one, and hath many members. And all the members make one body. These members should have a care for, and sympathy with one another. If a particular Christian ought not rashly to separate himself from the communion of his brethren; neither ought a church hastily to withdraw herself from the fellowship of other churches. There must be gross errour in doctrine, or gross corruption in practice, and this pertinaciously retained, to justify a withdrawment, or rejection from communion, in the latter relation, as well as in the former.

One great end of the institution of churches, and of social worship in them, is the promotion of peace, harmony and love.—Those teachers, therefore, whose object is to cause divisions in churches, have nothing of the spirit of the gospel, but are manifestly pursuing a design in direct opposition to it. Jude, describing the imposters who had se-

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cretly crept in among christians, says, 'These are they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the spirit.' Verse 19. No words can be more plain and descriptive, than those of St. Paul. 'Mark them who cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have received, and avoid them. For they that are such serve not the Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and with good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.' Rom. xvi. 17, 18. They deceive by *fair speeches*. They profess uncommon sanctity, high assurance, extraordinary zeal, and immediate communication from the Spirit. As the apostle says, 'they commend and exalt themselves, and measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves among themselves, as if they were perfect and infallible standards.—They justify their separations by pretensions, that others are not spiritual enough for their communion—they would form a pure church.' The language of their conduct is, 'Stand by yourselves, come not near, for we are holier than you.' But what says the

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God of peace and purity? 'These are a smoke in my nose; a fire that burneth all the day.' Isaiah lxv. 5.

The promoters of divisions, the better to accomplish their wicked purposes, are watchful to take advantage of any unhappy circumstance in a church; such as an accidental contention, the discipline of an offending member, the sickness or removal, the death or the temporary absense of the stated pastor: As the wolf leaps into the fold, when the shepherd is withdrawn, or a gap is opened. Paul, who knew their craft better than he wished, says to the elders at Ephesus, 'I know that *after my departure*, shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to *draw away disciples after them.*' Acts xx. 29, 30. They are industrious to make disciples: But to whom?—To Christ? No, but to themselves. It is with this view that they ramble from fold to fold, and enter into other men's flocks. So Christ says to the scribes, 'Ye compass sea and land to

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make one proselyte;' leaving no art untried for that end. But what is their intention? Is it that their proselyte may be more devoted to God? No: It is that he may be attached to them, and so add to their importance. 'When he is made,' says Christ, 'ye make him more the child of hell than yourselves. Your corrupt flatteries only harden him in his wickedness.' Matth. xxiii. 15. So Jude says of them, 'They have men's persons in admiration because of advantage;' esteeming and applauding this and that man, not on account of his real virtue and worth, but only on account of his readiness to serve *their* designs. 'No, no,' they will tell you, 'we have no such unworthy aims: But the churches are fallen from the gospel purity. And we are pressed in spirit to testify against them; we would by all means save some.' Is this their intention? Why then climb they over the walls, instead of entering by the door? Why creep they in unawares, instead of walking upright? Why apply they not to the pastors of churches, to convince them of, and reclaim them from the

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supposed errours and corruptions? Would not this be the surest and directest way to reform corrupt and erroneous churches? This is the way that Christ has pointed out. When John was sent to the degenerate churches of Asia, did he neglect the stated pastor, and address the people without *his* knowledge? Did he attempt to disaffect them to, and detatch them from *his* ministry? Did he cause divisions and separations in order to make one pure church out of seven corrupt ones? No: John's letters are directed immediately to the *angel*, or *pastor* of each church, to be by *him* communicated to the people. Thus the spirit spake to the churches. John acted by command of Christ. 'To the *angel* of the church write'—'These things saith the *Son* of *God*'—'He that hath an ear let him hear, what the spirit saith to the churches.' The churches were to hear what was spoken in this way: But they were not to hear every man who came in the garb of a teacher, and who, by his high pretensions to inspiration, subverted the order which Christ had settled. There were

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enough such among them. Therefore one church is reproved, because she suffered them to teach, who falsely called themselves prophets: And another is commended, because she could not bear them that were evil; and tried them, who said they were apostles, and were not; and found them liars.

It is a certain mark of a false teacher, if under pretence of reforming churches, he causes and encourages divisions in them. There were corruptions in most of the Asiatic churches: In some of them there were but few members, who had not defiled their garments. And what were these few to do? Withdraw, lest they should be infected with the filthy garments of their brethren?—No: But to watch and keep their own garments, to save others with fear, and encourage the purity which remained. Rev. ii. and iii. chapters.

VIII. False teachers usually attend more to the form, than to the power of godliness.

The preaching of the apostles was rational, solid and convincing. It tended to make

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men wise and good, humble and holy, pious and benevolent.—They taught that, 'the kingdom of God was not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost'—that 'in Christ neither circumcision, nor uncircumcision availed; but a new creature, keeping the commandments of God, and faith working by love.' Their doctrine was according to godliness. Imposters rather lay weight on certain distinguishing tenets and usages of their own; on particular modes and forms; on the means and instruments of religion; on things suited to strike the passions and captivate the affections. With men of this character, conversion, though perhaps much talked of, is only coming over to their sect, and adopting their peculiar sentiments and forms. When they gain proselytes to their party, they boast the number of their converts; and urge their success, as an evidence that God is with them. The blind, hypocritical guides, so often reproved by our Saviour, made religion to consist more in tything mint, anise and cummin, in long and noisy pray-

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ers, and frequent fasts, than in righteousness, mercy, faith and the love of God. Matth. xxiii. Those vagrants, who went out from the apostles because they were not of them, and who subverted the souls of the believers, taught, that except men were circumcised, and observed the ceremonies of the law, they could not be saved. Acts xv. The false apostles in Corinth, and evil workers in Philippi, had confidence in the flesh, in external rites and forms; they gloried that they were Hebrews, Israelites, and the seed of Abraham. 2 Cor. xi. Phil. iii. 2, 3, 4. The perverters of the gospel in Galatia turned their hearers to weak and beggarly elements, and taught them to observe days and months, times and years. Gal. iv. 9, 10. The unruly and vain talkers and deceivers in Ephesus and in Crete, who crept into houses, and subverted whole families, had only a form of godliness; they denied the power of it. They sought to please such as could not endure sound doctrine, and to gratify their itching ears. They humoured the disposition of those, who, after their own

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lusts, heaped to themselves teachers; they amused them with fables, instead of edifying them with sound doctrine. 2 Tim. iii. and iv. chapters. Titus i. 10, 11.

The apostles of Christ used great plainness of speech; by manifestation of the truth commended themselves to every man's conscience; warned and taught every man in all wisdom, that they might present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. The false apostles aimed only to move the passions, please the fancy and excite the admiration of their hearers. They allured them with *great, swelling* words of *vanity;*' with words tending both to exalt themselves, and swell the pride and self-confidence of their deluded admirers. They might boast of their numerous converts; but converts made only by the agitation of the passions, without instruction of mind or change of temper, are but as 'trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead,' plucked up by the roots.'

The ancient Jews, in their corruptest state, called frequent assemblies, appointed solemn meetings, and multiplied their offer-

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ings; they sought God daily, asked of him the ordinances of justice, and took delight in approaching to him, as a nation that did righteousness and forsook not the ordinances of their God. But God's instituted sabbath and worship was no delight to them. They would worship God in any time or manner, except that which he had prescribed. The prophet is therefore directed to cry aloud against them, and teach them their transgression. Isaiah lviii.

However zealous we are to heap to ourselves teachers, and multiply to ourselves seasons of worship, if we neglect the worship of God on the day and in the place, which he has appointed, our religion is but an empty form. Such a perversion of God's ordinances proceed not from spiritual zeal, but from worldly lust.*

* Corrupt teachers often speak of frequent conversions, and great revivals of religion under their preaching and among their sect; and hence would induce people to believe, that they are owned of God. This, however, is not an errour peculiar to them. We sometimes see it in upright and worthy characters. When men, warmed by controversy, attach themselves to different systems of doctrine, they are too apt, on both sides, to urge

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IX. This sort of teachers are described as opposing subordination under insidious pretensions of liberty.

The apostle cautions the Ephesians, that 'they be not carried away—by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, by which they lie in wait to deceive.' Chap. iv. 14.

success as an evidence of the truth of their respective systems. But it is better to resort to the law and to the testimony, than to supposed success, as the test of truth: 'The testimony of the Lord is sure.' But of the real success of preaching we may be very imperfect judges. Supposed conversions and apparent revivals, however promising at present, may terminate differently from our expectations. Ministers, who agree in their sentiments and in their manner of preaching, seem to have different success; and those, who differ in some circumstances, may have equal success. And how great soever a minister's success may be, he cannot be sure, how much to impute to this or that particular doctrine, or to his own manner of preaching. 'Who is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, as the Lord gave to every man?' When ministers make their supposed success, the criterion of truth, there is danger, that they will be too uncandid toward one another.

One thing we should all bear in mind, that conversion is a real change from sin to holiness. That consequently a revival of religion consists not merely in an increase of zeal for opinions and forms, but rather in an increase of piety and humility, charity and brotherly love. And wherever it takes place, it will lead to peace and condescension, harmony and union. Ephraim will not envy Judah, nor Judah vex Ephraim; and the only provocation will be to love and good works.

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He alludes to the fraudful dexterity of practised gamesters in managing a die, or cube, as the word signifies, which they will throw with such a sleight, as to make the side come up which they wish. Much so crafty deceivers toss men about by addressing their feelings, and plying them with subjects suited to agitate their passions. And, for this spiritual legerdemain, they seldom find a more handy instrument, than the form of liberty. Their first object is to unsettle people's minds from the doctrine and order of the gospel, by insinuating, that their understandings have been imposed on, and their consciences enslaved, and it is time to assert their liberty. If they can only set men afloat, they hope to take the direction of them into their own hands. This game the devil too successfully played with our progenitors in Eden. He insinuated, that they were held in ignorance and blind obedience; and if they would throw off the restraint, their eyes would be opened. The ministers of Satan use the same artifice. Corah would persuade the Jews, that they were led about

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blindfold by Moses, and priest-ridden by the standing order. Peter and Jude describe seducers, as 'despising government,' and endeavouring, under pretence of liberty, to level all distinctions: As 'murmurers and complainers; presumptuous and self-willed; and as sporting in their deceptions:' As headstrong in their ways, and incapable of being mended by counsel, or reclaimed by reason.*

* Peter mentions this among other marks of false teachers, that in their festivals or assemblies, *they sported themselves with their own deceivings:* Or with certain devices to deceive their followers; thus *beguiling unstable souls.* Ireneus, a Christian father, who wrote soon after the apostles, has mentioned a particular device, which Peter is here supposed to allude to. Speaking of these heretics, he says, 'They made it their custom, in their festivals, *sortibus ludere,* to play with lots.' How these lots were applied, Peter may be supposed to intimate, when he says, their *sporting* was to *deceive* and *beguile,* that they might better *exercise their covetous practices.* It is probable that these deceivers, pretending, that a lot drawn in a particular manner was a divine decision, took upon them thus to direct men's conduct, and to predict their destiny. Hence it appears that the impious practice, lately known among us, of discovering men's spiritual state by a *lottery,* is not so novel as some have imagined. Something similar to it seems to have been in use among those religious gamesters who vexed the church in, and soon after the apostles' time. But the use of passages of sacred writ in a way of lottery, is a

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Paul gives the same account of them in his second letter to Timothy. He says, 'Perilous times shall come, for men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous,' teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake; 'proud, and boasters of their own superior sanctity; 'evil speakers and disobedient to parents' under pretence of being more godly than they; 'unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, covenant breakers,' or disregarding the covenant obligations which they are under to the church of God: 'false accusers, incontinent,' or much given to lust; 'fierce' and malignant in their tempers; 'heady and high-minded:' and yet assuming a 'form of godliness!' 'Of this sort are they who creep into houses, to lead the simple captive. From such turn away.' What is the liberty, which such goodly patrons procure? The apostle calls it *captivity*, or *subjection* to *divers lusts*. It is a liberty, which begins in licentiousness and

species of impiety probably unknown to the ancients. This improvement on the old plan modern gamesters may doubtless appropriate.

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ends in bondage. Peter says, 'They allure through the lusts of the flesh those who had escaped from them that live in errour.—While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption; for of whom a man is overcome, of the same he is brought into bondage.' 2 epistle ii. 18, 19. They relax the strict precepts of the gospel, preach doctrines suited to men's corrupt inclinations; flatter their spiritual pride, and bolster them up with false hopes by hastily pronouncing them in a state of grace. Thus delivering them from the restraints of fear, they plunge them into more absolute bondage to their lusts, and make their last state worse than the first.

I would observe once more.

X. False teachers corrupt the word of God and handle it deceitfully. In opposition to them Paul says, 'We are not as *many*, who corrupt the word of God. We have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty—not handling the word of God deceitfully'—2 Cor. ii. 17—and iv. 2. One common way in which they corrupt the word is, by 'turn-

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ing the truth into fables,' or by rejecting the plain, literal meaning of scripture for the sake of a mystical, allegorical sense which they absurdly call the 'spiritual sense.'— Thus they make the whole bible uncertain, and are at liberty to give every text a fanciful turn, which best serves their own purpose, or pleases the humour of their hearers.

There were, in the apostles' days, some of this fantastic complexion. They denied the literal incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ; and affirmed that his body was only spectral, and his death and resurrection only illusive. They professed high perfection in holiness, absolute freedom from sin, clear discernment of spiritual things, uncommon illuminations from God. It is manifest, that the epistle of Jude, and the first epistle of John, were written in opposition to these enthusiastic, mystical religionists. Jude calls them 'dreamers;' men whose religious notions were as wild and incoherent, as the sports of imagination in a dream.

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Some deistical writers have taken this method to subvert the credit of revelation: and the same artifice others have used to propagate their irrational and unscriptural opinions.

Nothing can be more dangerous than this way of interpreting scripture. If we deny its literal meaning, and conceive the real sense to be hidden in mysteries, allegories, and fanciful illusions, we entirely destroy its use: And then, in our inquiries after truth and duty, what rule shall we find to guide us? Every man's fancy must be his guide, which, like an *ignis fatuus*, will mislead the wandering pilgrim into bogs and morasses of errour, and finally ingulph him in everlasting ruin.

I have now laid before you some of the distinguishing characters of false teachers; and you will consider and remember, that they are characters drawn, not by me, but by the sacred scriptures. Where they apply, let them apply. If you perceive that you have hitherto been under false teachers, it is time to renounce them and seek others:

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If you find otherwise, act accordingly.—Teachers you are to have; but let them be gospel ones. You must judge for yourselves; but if you judge wrong, it is at your peril. 'Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads to life, and few there be that find it: Therefore beware of false prophets.' Some seem to think it pretty indifferent whom they follow. If it be so, tell me why our divine Lord, and all his apostles, have taken so much care to guard you against imposters and intruders; and why they have given you such perpetual cautions against them?

If you suspect, that the doctrines of religion believed by your fathers, and the order of the churches, and the manner of introducing and supporting public teachers, which have generally obtained in the land, are unscriptural and destructive; if you imagine, that the churches in the country have been no better than synagogues of Satan; that God has never owned them as his churches, nor blessed the word and ordinances administered in them; if you suppose,

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that your fathers have been only fools and hypocrites, and that you, grown better and wiser, are bound as Christians, to encourage innovations tending to the subversion of these churches; if these are your honest sentiments, this only would I learn of you; when did piety and virtue, peace and good order most abound!—In the days of our fathers?—Or since these supposed improvements have taken place?

There are some things in religion, which all must allow to be great and essential; such as justice, mercy, faith, benevolence, peaceableness, condescension and humility. The promotion of these is one great end of social worship, and of all special institutions. If we find, that any particular opinions and usages do in fact answer this important end, there is a strong presumption in favour of them. But if, on the contrary, as new sentiments and forms take place, they who adopt them become more swoln with pride and self confidence; more apt to vilify, censure and condemn their fellow Christians, and more industrious to sow dis-

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cord among brethren; this is a shrewd sign, that their notions are not founded in truth: At least it proves, that their religion has done *them* no good.

When a minister warns his people against innovations in doctrine and worship, against heaping to themselves teachers, and countenancing divisions in churches, it is common that they impute to him some selfish design. Whatever opinion you may have of your own minister's views in preaching the gospel, yet if you only consider him as a man not divested of the common feelings of humanity, you will know it is impossible, that he should be indifferent to your interest. Can you imagine, that one, who has ministered to you, and been conversant with you, in all circumstances of prosperity and adversity, from his youth for near thirty years; who has seen a great part of you grow up under his ministry; who has been supported by your liberality, and happy in your steady friendship; can you imagine, that such an one will not *naturally* care for you? Can a stranger, on a transient interview,

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have feelings like him? Believe the things now offered to be warnings of love.—I know them to be words of truth.

It is a day, when the churches in the land are in danger; and you are not exempt. Vice and immorality prevail; destructive errours make progress; the minds of many are unsettled from the truth, and from the order of the gospel; important doctrines are denied or called in question; sacred institutions are treated with contempt; and notions subversive of peace and virtue are zealously propagated and eagerly embraced. But be not you carried about with divers and strange doctrines. It is a good thing, that the heart be established with grace.

The remarkable prevalence of errour and disorder in churches, at this particular time, proceeds chiefly, I imagine, from two causes. First, from the great carelessness and stupidity of former years, in consequence of which, many have grown up unprincipled in religion, and unfurnished with doctrinal knowledge, and so are peculiarly exposed to the impositions of designing men, and utter-

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ly unprovided for their own defence. And, secondly, from the natural operations of the late civil war. Though it ultimately became a *national*, yet, in its origin and earliest stages, it was properly a *civil* war. And such a war seldom fails to produce confusion in religion. The reason is obvious: In a civil war the same people, divided into opposite interests, are filled with more violent animosities, than those which take place between contending nations. The mutual jealousies and resentments, zeal and engagedness of party against party, augmented by mutual recriminations, proximity of situation, and the remembrance of past connexions, put the mind on the stretch, disturb the nervous system, and throw the spirits into an agitation nearly bordering on enthusiasm. To aggravate the animosity, religion is usually introduced on both sides, and, contrary to her mild disposition, is compelled to bear a part in the keen and angry controversy. In such a state of mind, people are peculiarly susceptible of delusive impressions; consequently new teachers, who

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rise up, and labour to infuse into Christians jealousies of each other, or of their stated instructors, are listened to with avidity, and received with credulity. At such a time men become a much easier prey to errour and seduction, than in those calmer periods, when their spirits are more serene and dispassionate. And Satan doubtless takes advantage of the turbid scene, more darkly to ply his temptations, and more successfully to spread the confusion.

You have need, my brethren, to be peculiarly on your guard. Beware, lest, being led away with the errour of the wicked, you fall from your own steadfastness. Remember the sacred obligations you are under as professors of religion. Let your faith in the truth of the gospel be confirmed by those appearances in the state of the church, which the apostles have *so expressly foretold and so plainly described.* Attend on God's appointed ordinances, adhere closely to his word, and cease to hear the instructions, which cause to err from the words of knowledge. Let your minds be calm in all your religious

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inquiries. Let not passion, jealousy or party design have any influence in forming your principles, or determining your practice.

Consider that religion is a matter of infinite importance; a business whose consequences are not terminated with time, but reach forward into all the depths of eternity. Treat it always as a most serious concern; prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

'But why all this ado about false teachers,' some will ask, 'and why are ministers so averse to assistance in bringing souls to Christ? The husbandman, if the harvest is great, rejoices to see labourers come into his field.'

My brethren, the field is not ours; it is our Master's. Ye are God's husbandry; we are his stewards, and must obey his orders. We rejoice in the help of those, whom he approves and sends.—But if we silently admit intruders, who purloin the crop; mar the corners of the field; trample the grain, or bind the sheaves so slightly, that they cannot be gathered into his barn; what shall

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we do when he riseth up? and when he visiteth, what shall we answer him?

'But ought we not to attend on preaching, where we are best edified?'

You are to study the things, which make for peace, and by which you may edify one another. You are to make increase to the edifying of yourselves in love. You are not to be selfish in your religion, any more than in your worldly business. You are to consider one another to provoke to love and good works. If under pretence of personal edification, you pursue the measures which tend to hinder the edification of your brethren, you act contrary to the character of Christians, as much as he acts contrary to the character of a good citizen, who manages his worldly business to the prejudice of his neighbour's interest. Mistake not the emotions of passion, the flights of imagination or the occasional flow of affection for godly edifying. You are then edified, when you increase in knowledge, faith, purity, peaceableness, and good works. If you break the bond of peace, and the unity of

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the spirit, where is your edifying? 'The church is to come together into one place' —'to be builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.' The members of it are to be joined to the head by faith, and to each other by love. If they are divided and scattered, they have not the Spirit of God, nor the temper of Christians, and there is no edifying.

'But what if we have a minister, whose preaching is not agreeable to us; must we hear *him* only?'

If his preaching is not agreeable to the gospel, you ought by no means to be content with it. But what will you do? Will you silently withdraw, and leave your less discerning brethren to perish under his corrupt ministry? Rather take gospel measures to convince him; or, if he is irreclaimable, to remove him. You are not to scatter away promiscuously from a bad minister; but he is to be put away by a regular, public censure of the churches, that a good one may succeed. This union is to be preserved, and future impositions prevented.

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'But a minister may preach the gospel, and yet his *manner* not be entertaining. May we not please ourselves?'

You are sensible, that hearers have a diversity of tastes, as well as ministers a diversity of gifts; and among Christians of the same society there must be some condescension. 'Ye that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not merely to please yourselves. Let every one of you please his neighbour for his good to edification'—Paul, Apollos and Cephas preached the same gospel; but in a different manner. Some were pleased with Paul's reasoning; some admired Apollos's eloquence; and some were charmed with Peter's warmth of address. So much might be expected. But when they ran into parties, and some attached themselves to this, and some to that preacher in opposition to each other, what said Paul to them? 'Ye are carnal and walk as men.'

Itching *ears* indicate an ill humour in the blood; and they who with such ears, *heap to themselves teachers*, are said to do it, not

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after the spirit of God, but *after their own lusts:* Not because they love religion, but because *they cannot endure sound doctrine.* From such teachers as creep into houses, or churches, to lead the simple captive, you are to turn away. Those who cause divisions you are to mark and avoid. You are not to bid them, God speed.

'But surely there is such a thing as a justifiable separation; else why says Paul to the Corinthians, *Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate?*' 2 Cor. vi. 17.

Doubtless there is a justifiable separation; just such an one as Paul recommends. And what is this?—Not a separation from the *church;* for this direction is given to the *church;* and Paul could not mean, that the church ought to separate from *herself:* But it is a separation from the vices of the world, and from the idolatries of the heathens. So the apostle explains it: 'What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?' And how were these Christians to separate? The apostle tells them: 'There-

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fore let us cleanse *ourselves* from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit—'

'Is there no case then, in which Christians may separate from a church?'

There may be such a case. If a church is so essentially and irreclaimably corrupt, as to cease to be a church of Christ, then, after we have in vain tried the gospel measures already mentioned, for her reformation, we ought to withdraw from her communion. On this principle, the protestants separated from the church of Rome. She had introduced idolatry in its external form, adopted another rule of faith besides the scriptures, set up another head and acknowledged other mediators besides Jesus Christ, and she persecuted even to prison and death, those who testified against her errours and laboured for her reformation. The apostle John, Rev. xviii. 4, speaking prophetically of the corrupt state of this church, says, 'I heard a voice from heaven, saying, *Come out from her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.*' Or if a church requires such terms of com-

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munion, as we think unlawful, we can have no fellowship with her in divine ordinances, though we may have a charitable opinion of her, as a true church. There is a material difference between a church's holding certain errours, and her making an adoption of those errours a term of communion to others. But in this case she rather excludes us, than we separate from her. Our fathers were, in this manner, driven from the church of England. They owned her as a church of Christ, and would have continued in her communion, notwithstanding certain usages, which they thought unscriptural, if she would have dispensed with their conformity to her therein; but as she made an entire conformity an indispensible term of communion, they thought themselves bound to withdraw. It was not a separation on *their* part, but an exclusion on *her* part. Or if a number of professed Christians should separate from a church with which they are in solemn covenant, and form themselves into a society in opposition to their brethren, and thus cause divisions and offences, however

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candidly we may think of them, as honest, but deluded Christians, we cannot have communion with them as a church, not only because they renounce us, but also because they combine to subvert such as we suppose to be churches of Christ. We are to mark and avoid them. But smaller errours in doctrine or discipline, when they are not made terms of communion, can never justify such a separation as implies a renouncing of communion. Christ owns and treats the churches in Asia, as his churches, though most of them had greatly degenerated: And far from encouraging the purer christians to withdraw from the rest, he commands them to be watchful and strengthen the things that remain. And let no man dare to judge and despise those, whom God has received. Rom. xiv. 1, 2.

An honest zeal for the purity of churches, is to God an odour of a sweet smell; but complaints of corruption, when they proceed from spleen and hypocrisy, are a smoke in his nostrils. Many, who are loud in complaining of disorders in churches, instead of

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attempting to reform them, only urge them as pretensions for separating from their brethren, with whom they are in solemn covenant. Instead of adopting the animating language of the Levites to Ezra, *Arise, for this matter belongeth to thee; we also will be with thee;* they only stand and discharge some blind and random reproaches; then face about, and withdraw. Thus they discourage the hearts of their brethren, strengthen the hands of evil doers, and provide a retreat for the guilty, who would evade the just discipline of the church. How frequent is the case, that when an offending brother is admonished for his sins, he defeats the instituted means of his repentance, and seeks refuge from merited censure, by flying to some other sect, who make him welcome with all his sins, having his person in admiration, because of advantage.

To conclude: Be ye all like minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus, that ye may, with one mind and mouth, glorify God. Be not deceived by false appearances. The kingdom of God cometh

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not with outward show and ostentation; neither is there occasion to say, Lo, here; or, lo, there; for it is a kingdom within men. True religion is peaceable, modest and humble: Hypocrisy is turbulent, noisy and vain. False doctrines, like dry winds, are blustering and unsteady, violent in their motions, and noxious in their effects. The doctrines of truth are like the gentle dews on the tender herb, and the showers on the grass. Be ye not carried about with every wind of doctrine. The sincere Christian, rooted and grown up in Christ, and established in the faith, with knowledge and judgment, like the deep rooted oak, stands firm and unmoved, whatever winds may blow; while false converts and unprincipled professors, like withered leaves, are caught in the giddy whirl, wafted around and made the sport of each wanton gust. Conclude not that there is most true religion, where the flame of zeal seems to mount the highest. Chaff and stubble will spring into a sudden blaze, which towers for a moment, and then expires: Solid fuel burns more moderately,

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but yields a more steady and genial heat. Paul, while a pharisee, was zealous to madness against the truth; when he became a Christian, his zeal was as much changed as his object. You now see no more of his former madness: His Christian zeal is a calm, rational, firm resolution, bearing him along in the course of duty, with equable motion, through every opposition and danger. The spirit of true religion is not in the storm, the earthquake or the fire, but in the still, small voice.

And now the God of all grace and wisdom grant, that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and all judgment, that ye may approve the things that are excellent, that ye may be sincere and without offence until the day of Christ, and may be filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of GOD.

AMEN.

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APPENDIX.

IN the preceding pages we have endeavoured to maintain this position, 'That no man has a right to officiate, or ought to be received, in the character of a publick teacher of religion, until he has been approved and recommended by *Elders of Churches.*'

The scriptural evidence in support of our position, we hope cannot reasonably be controverted. But an objection will perhaps meet us from supposed necessity, or historical fact.

'Many centuries,' it will be said, 'have elapsed, since Christ commissioned his apostles, and since they ordained their successors: And how can we know, that the succession has been continued without interruption? And if there has been an interruption, then there was a time, when ordination was taken up anew by private Christians.

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What then are all present ordinations, traced to their origin, but lay-ordinations?'

This objection may deserve an answer.

The great question here must be, what is the institution of Christ, and the apostolic usage? By *these* we must be governed, and these must not be set aside by imaginary necessity, or suppositious facts.

The gospel history confirms the position which we have laid down. A ministry in the church is undeniably instituted by Christ—introduction to the ministry, in the apostolic age, was by prayer and the imposition of the hands of *elders*—this usage was invariably, and without a single deviation, continued, as long as the sacred history affords any light—the directions concerning ordinations are given to *bishops*, or *elders*, and to them *only*—no provision is made for cases of necessity, or for the renewal of the ministry, if it should happen to cease—we have an express promise from Christ, that he will support his church, and be with his ministers *always* even to the *end of the world*. When we compare this promise with the

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institution of the ministry, and the mode of introduction, which immediately followed, we think it can import no less, than that a regular ministry, should never cease in the church, nor any necessity occur for departing from the instituted manner of introduction. We have the institution, the promise, and the apostolic practice in our favour; and what more do we need? The promise, so emphatically expressed, and so clearly interpreted by subsequent usage, must, we think, be understood as we have stated it.

It is then by no means necessary, that, by historical deduction, we should prove an uninterrupted succession; we have a right to presume it, until evidence appears to the contrary. If any say, the succession has failed, the burthen of proof must lie wholly on them. Let them from incontestible history, shew us the time, place and manner in which it terminated—who were the last ministers in the line from the apostles—who the first in the new line—who the laymen that ordained them—and where was the scene of the transaction.—Until we have this infor-

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mation, we rely on the promise of Christ, in the sense in which we understand it.

But it will be asked, 'What if a number of Christians should be cast on a desolate coast or island, or should emigrate to a country secluded from intercourse with the Christian world, and should have among them no ordained minister? May they not ordain ministers for themselves? May not ministers thus ordained venture to officiate?

But tell me first, Where is this solitary island or coast—this secluded country of Christians?—Did you ever read of a colony of pious Christians emigrating to a new country, who forgot to take ministers with them; or whom no ministers would accompany or follow? If no such case has ever happened, or is ever likely to happen, it is not strange, that the *Head* of the church has made no provision for it; nor is it necessary, that we should undertake to remedy his omission.

But probably some will still imagine, that fact is against us. They will tell us, 'Ordinations came down to us through the

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church of Rome; and there was a time when that church was so essentially corrupt, that she ceased to be a church of Christ, and her officers ceased to be ministers of Christ; and therefore they, who withdrew from her, at the time of the reformation, having among them no valid ordinations, must have begun them anew.'

But will history support this conclusion? Did the first reformers, distrusting their past ordinations, receive one from their lay-brethren?—The contrary is most evident. The protestant reformers in England early drew up a confession of their faith, in which, as Doctor Burnet says, 'they censure any who should take upon them to preach, or administer the sacraments, without having lawfully received the power from the *ministers*, to whom *alone* the right of conferring that power doth appertain.' Certainly they had no apprehension, that the ministerial succession was at an end.

The Roman church, though at that time exceedingly corrupt, appears not to have materially corrupted her ordinations. In

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this matter, we do not find, that the reformers alledged any complaint.

Though corruptions early began in the Christian church, yet their progress was gradual and slow. In every age many dissented from them, great opposition was made to them, and large councils of bishops, or ministers, publicly condemned them. The western or Roman church ultimately carried her corruptions to a more extravagant height, than the oriental or Greek church; but even in the former, they never came to their crisis, until the famous council of *Trent*, which was opened more than twenty, and closed more than forty years, after the beginning of Luther's reformation. That council, called by the Pope's bull, and supported by the Emperor's arms, in opposition to the reformers, 'established,' as Doctor Tillotson says, 'several *New Articles* which had *never before* been acknowledged by any general council.' Those new articles, if avowed by some, yet had not been generally received in their full extent, as now declared. If they had been decreed by one council, it

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was but a partial one, and they were soon after condemned by another; and therefore were not to be considered as the received and acknowledged doctrines of the church. At this time, as the Doctor observes, 'the errours of the church of Rome rose to their height.' He demands of the papists, 'where their religion was before the council of *Trent*.' He challenges them, 'to shew a religion, consisting of *all* the same articles which are defined by that council, as necessary to salvation, professed by any Christian church in the world *before that time*.'

Luther and his associates, in their first opposition to the errours of the Roman church, did not consider her, as having *essentially* departed from the gospel, or as being utterly disowned by Christ; for their primary object was, not to withdraw from her, but to effect a reformation by means which might preserve the general union. They never renounced her, until they and their adherents were excommunicated, and all hopes of union were cut off; but, on the contrary, demanded a *free* and *general* coun-

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cil, to deliberate on means of accomplishing the reformation so much desired. When Luther was constrained to disclaim that church, Doctor Mosheim observes, 'he separated himself from it, only as it acknowledged the Pope to be infallible; not from the church considered in a more extensive sense; for he submitted to the decision of the *universal* church, when that decision should be given in a *general* council *lawfully* assembled.' 'This,' says Doctor Maclaine, 'was a judicious distinction; for though the papacy was confounded with the catholic church, they were in reality different things. The papacy had indeed by degrees incorporated itself into the church; but it was a preposterous supplement, and as foreign to its genuine constitution, as a new citadel erected by a successful usurper, would be to an ancient city. Luther acted on this distinction; he went out of the *citadel;* but he meant to remain in the *city*, and, like a good patriot, designed to reform its government.' But when the advocates for a general reformation despaired of their object, they came out

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from that irreclaimable church, that they might not partake of her sins, nor receive of her plagues. And we derive our ordinations from those who came out, not from those who remained behind—from the purer part which embraced, not from the corrupter part which opposed the reformation. It cannot then be true, that our ordinations came through the church of Rome, if by that appellation is intended the corrupt body which the protestants renounced. And surely none will alledge, that those pious men, who had long opposed her corruptions, and contended for a reformation, were themselves too erroneous to be owned as ministers, or that their hands were too unclean to convey a pure ordination.

One cannot here but feel the striking contrast between those ancient reformers, who laboured to correct the errours, without breaking the union of the church, and certain modern pretenders, who, in the first instance, separate themselves from the churches, and then exclaiming against them as

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corrupt, promote and encourage divisions in them.

It is observable, that ministers were the first to bear testimony against the prevailing corruptions—the first to stand forth in the cause of truth and purity; and God owned them as his faithful servants, and succeeded them in their arduous undertaking.

In the greatest part of Germany, and in many other places, the main body of the clergy soon declared in favour of the reformation, and united their efforts in its cause. In England, more than an hundred years before Luther, the seeds of it were sown by the doctrines of Wickliff. And though their growth was retarded by the long inclemency of the season, yet they were gradually taking root, and, under the first warm beams, they sprang up and grew. The papal jurisdiction, which for ages had been denied, or received with great limitations, by the kings of England, was totally renounced in 1533, by Henry VIII, and the bishops; and the scriptures were declared to be the standard of religion. In this reign, Cranmer, as well

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before as after his promotion to the see of Canterbury, favoured the doctrines of Luther, which by his influence, obtained a considerable spread among the people and clergy. In 1547, when Edward VI, who had been educated in the principles of the reformation, came to the throne, the protestant religion, being patronized by the King and his court, and encouraged by many of the bishops, as well as other clergy, generally prevailed. And, after a short interruption in the bloody reign of Mary, it was fully established under Elizabeth in 1558. So that protestancy was in fact the religion of England, a number of years before the conclusion of the council of Trent.

The rapid progress of the reformation, and the vast number of ministers, who early embraced it, make it evident, that there could be no occasion; and the fervent zeal of the reformed against the errours of popery makes it as evident, that there could be no disposition, to receive ordinations in future from the papal clergy. And therefore, without the labour of tracing a lineal succession, we

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have clear historical evidence, that our ordinations descended not from the church of Rome, after she became so corrupt, as in the opinion of protestants, to cease from being a true church.

It will perhaps be asked, 'How do we know, but the first reformers had been ordained by some of the vilest men in the Roman church?' But let me ask, how do we know, or is it probable, that this was the case? The reformers themselves appear to have entertained no scruples on this head. Let it still be remembered, that irregularity in ordinations was not made matter of complaint against her; that her corruptions had not so early risen to their height; and that she had not yet established, by a general council, her grossest errours, nor expunged her purest members.

But admitting that a man of corrupt principles and morals acts in an ordination; will his character nullify the transaction? As long as the scribes sat in Moses' seat, Christ acknowledged them as officers of the Jewish church; nor did he deny the authority of

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the high priest, though his personal character was far from recommending him.

The person ordained derives his authority to preach from Jesus Christ; not from the men who ordain him. They indigitate the person to be vested with this authority, and officially instate him in the regular exercise of it; but it is Christ's gospel, not their will, which must direct him in the execution of his office. If *they* are corrupt in principles or manners, it will not thence follow, that *he* must preach heresy or immorality. He is ordained to preach the gospel; and whoever may ordain him, the charge which he receives, and the vow which he makes, bind him to teach, not the commandments of men, but all things whatsoever Christ has commanded.

To break the chain of succession at the link in question, it must be proved, that the persons, from whom the first reformers received ordination, not only were in errours, but had actually ceased to be officers of Christ.

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With respect to the ordinations in this land little needs to be said. It is well known, that the first ministers in the country, were ordained in England, by men whose authority is not controverted. Though some of our fathers supposed that lay-ordinations might be justified, yet this sentiment was disapproved by their brethren in England; and was not so long retained here, as to be carried into practice. The instalment of persons already ordained, was in some instances, performed by lay-brethren; but during the first century after the settlement of New-England, ordinations were constantly solemnized by the hands of ordained elders, except in two or three instances; and even in these there was the presence and concurrence of elders, though they imposed not their hands. President *Stiles* says,* that 'no more than one such instance, in the last century, appears with certainty.' And if there were a few such instances, in different times and places, they affect not the succession; because, ordinations among us being

* Election Sermon.

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performed by a number of ministers, not by a single person, it may always be presumed, that some of the number are men regularly authorized.

The President, 'on a full, thorough and laborious inquiry,' affirms, that 'the succession, in the line of presbyters, was preserved without interruption, at the time of the reformation, and the New-England ordinations, in this line, may with assurance be traced back even to the holy apostles.'

FINIS.

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